

## How We Grow: Implementing the Spiritual Disciplines

### Week 4 - Meditation

April 7, 2024

#### I. Sharing Time

- A. How was your experience practicing the discipline of generosity this week? As you practiced throughout the week, did you notice or experience anything surprising, challenging, comforting, confusing, helpful, or encouraging? Invite your class to share with the people beside them, and then open it up for sharing with the class at large.

#### II. Teaching Time (*Teaching Video provided*)

- A. Teaching Narrative: If the goal of spiritual disciplines is to place ourselves before God in order that we might be transformed more fully in the way of Jesus, our relationship with Scripture has to be at the heart of that transformation. And while study is a part of that transformation (we'll talk about that discipline in a few weeks), this week our focus is on the spiritual discipline, meditation. There are two Hebrew words that are used more than fifty-eight times in the Old Testament to convey the idea of meditation. Richard Foster writes that these words have various meanings: "listening to God's word, reflecting on God's works, rehearsing God's deeds, ruminating on God's law, and more. In each case there is stress upon changed behavior as a result of our encounter with the living God."<sup>1</sup> One of the central passages connected to the discipline of meditation on God's Word is Psalm 119. Here are a few excerpts: "Turn my heart toward your statutes (vv.36)...Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long (vv. 97)...How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth (vv.103)...Your statutes are my heritage forever, they are the joy of my heart (vv. 111)." In our culture today, when we think of meditation, a lot of the time you are meditating in order to empty your mind, but that isn't Christian meditation! Christian meditation is all about filling our mind with God. Adele Calhoun writes, "Christian meditation opens us to the mind of God and to his world and presence in the world." We meditate on the words and works of God so that we might be filled with God more fully.

The Scriptures are a gift to us from God that helps us to see and experience God. It is like a window that allows us to see God more clearly and more fully. The Bible has been given to us relationally. Scot McKnight writes that God communicates through the

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperOne, 1998), 15.

Bible with His listening people [that's where meditation comes in] in conversation so that we might have a relationship with the God of the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

We practice the spiritual discipline of meditation not simply so we can acquire more knowledge of God's Word, but instead, we meditate so that we might *know God* more deeply and see the work of the Spirit of God in our lives. The discipline of meditation helps us to *slow down* so that we can *hear* God's voice and be filled with His words.

- B. Here's an initial question to discuss as a class: How have you practiced the spiritual discipline of meditation before? Share with the class about your past experiences with meditation.

### III. Discussion Time (*Questions Provided by Jason*)

- A. When you hear the word "meditation," what comes to mind? For many in our culture, the word "meditation" brings up images of Zen Buddhism and sitting cross-legged on the floor. Is that what comes to mind for you when you hear this term?
- B. In his message, Jason examined several passages to show that biblical meditation has a long and rich history. Was this a surprise to you? Have you ever heard of such a thing as "Christian meditation?"
- C. Jason defined meditation as reflecting on God's work and God's Word. Does one of those come more naturally to you? Do you find it easier to reflect on what God has said in the Scriptures or on what God has done in your life? How important is it to hold these two in balance?
- D. How is meditating on God's Word different than Bible study? In what ways are they similar?
- E. In Psalm 19:1, David says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." Can you think back to a time when you were in awe of God's glory as revealed in creation (a sunrise or sunset; seeing the Grand Canyon, etc.)? Take some time to share these experiences with each other.
- F. David goes on to say in Psalm 19:14, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer." What steps can we take to ensure that the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts are acceptable to God? What is the connection between the interior meditation of the heart and the exterior words we speak?

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<sup>2</sup> Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 88.

- G. Read Joshua 1:8. The Hebrew word for "meditate" is used to describe the growl of an animal. Eugene Peterson invites us to think of the sound a dog makes when it has a bone. He growls as he savors the bone, worrying at it, gnawing at it. Peterson says this is how we should meditate on God's Word. What do you think of this image? Is this helpful? How can we apply this to our lives?
- H. Read Psalm 1:1-6. The Psalmist says the one who delights in the law of the Lord is blessed. This delight in God's Word culminates in the act of meditating on the Word day and night (v2). In your opinion, how does meditation and reflection on God's Word transform our desires?
- I. Can you think of a practical way you would be willing to commit to meditation this week? It could be by focusing on God's work in creation; or it might mean reflecting on His promises in the Word. Share your commitment with one another.

IV. Invitation for the Week: This week, we want to invite you to practice one or both of these meditation guides four or five times. At least one time this week, practice the discipline within the context of one of your communities—with your spouse, family, roommates, or group of friends. **(Guided Prayer Videos are available at [mayfair.org/spiritualdisciplines](http://mayfair.org/spiritualdisciplines) or on Mayfair's Youtube page)**

A. *Lectio Divina*

1. This spiritual practice has been around for a long time. Because the beginnings of the Christian faith were primarily oral, this reading practice was incredibly common. The goal of the practice is to read and listen. What is this text saying? Is there an invitation in this text? Is there a connection to your life circumstances?
2. During this practice, you will read through a passage of Scripture three different times, meditating on its connection to your life and circumstances. There are five steps to this meditation practice:
  - a) Step 1 – *Silencio* – This is the space for quiet preparation and breath. It is similar to our experience with the practice of Examen. Let's begin with our breathe and posture. Sit in a comfortable spot with feet firmly planted on the ground. Notice your breathing. As you breath, imagine you are breathing in the very breath of God. As you breath out, imagine you are releasing any stress, anxiety, nervousness, fear, and insecurity.
  - b) Step 2 – *Lectio* - The first step is called "Lectio," or "Reading." This is where you sit down, and slowly and reflectively read a passage of scripture. This can be any passage of Scripture you'd like. Listen to one word or phrase that the Spirit has given you. Don't be critical or judgmental of the word. Be open to what God is speaking.

- c) Step 3 – *Meditatio* - Begin by rereading the passage of Scripture and then “reflect” on it. Allow it to sink deep into the depths of your being. Allow the Spirit to bring to your mind and heart an experience or issue that you are facing right now that seems to connect with your word or phrase. Don’t force it. Allow it to emerge.
  - d) Step 4 – *Oratio* - Step 3 is our “response” to the first two steps. As you reread once again as the question, “Is God inviting you to do or be something in the next few days?” Listen for an invitation.
  - e) Step 5 – *Contemplatio* - This final step is an opportunity to enjoy the presence of God, and allow the words you have read and meditated on transform you from the inside out. How can this passage affect the way you see the world and affect how you live everyday?
3. It doesn’t matter when or where. Take your time and walk through the practice slowly and intentionally. This practice shouldn’t be rushed. Use your journal to write down what you heard.
4. Here are some options for *Lectio Divina* readings:
- a) Exodus 3:1-6
  - b) Psalm 16
  - c) Psalm 27
  - d) Psalm 42
  - e) Psalm 130
  - f) Jeremiah 1:4-10
  - g) Matthew 6:25-34
  - h) Mark 10:46-52
  - i) Romans 5:1-5
  - j) Philippians 2:1-11

#### B. Imaginative Reading<sup>5</sup>

1. Jesus, God with us, engages our imagination. Curt Thompson writes, “In Jesus, God comes not simply to be in the same room, but rather to walk right up to us, look us in the eye, touch us on the shoulder, and speak our names out loud, smile, and share a drink with us, all the while engaging, persuading, challenging, inviting, convicting,

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<sup>5</sup> Practice adapted from Jackie L. Halstead, *Leaning into God’s Embrace: A Guidebook for Contemplative Prayer* (Abilene: Leafwood Publishers, 2021), 44-45.

and empowering each of us, loving us into new creation. And in the process, our neural networks are changed.”<sup>4</sup>

2. We’re going to engage our imagination in this new practice called imaginative reading. This is a new way that you can engage your senses and your imagination. I’m going to read through a text a couple of times. The goal is for you to experience the text in new and fresh ways. Read through it slowly, and after the second reading, As you read, try to imaginatively enter the event of the text using all your senses—sight, hearing, touch, and smell.
3. Here are the instructions:
  - a) What do you feel?
    - (1) Is the weather hot? Do you feel a breeze? Can you feel the ground under your feet? The fabric of the clothes of those around you?
  - b) What do you smell?
    - (1) Animal smells? Body odor? Is it a dusty day? Do you smell food from the market? Try to imagine those very smells.
  - c) What do you hear?
    - (1) The loud voices of the crowd? Animal sounds? Birds? The voice of the disciples arguing with Jesus? Do you hear the voice of Jesus?
  - d) What do you see?
    - (1) Is this sky blue? Do you see the crowd? The disciples? Do you see the woman touching the hem of Jesus’ garment? Do you see Jesus?
  - e) Where are you in the event?
    - (1) Are you in the crowd? Are you standing beside Jesus? Are you the person in need of healing?
  - f) Now take a moment to watch the event take place. What does Jesus look like to you/ What do you notice about his eyes? The way he talks to people? His clothes? How does he walk?
  - g) Stay right there and let everything fade but you and Jesus. Go to him. Sit beside him. How do you respond to his presence? Do you talk to him? What do you feel called to share? Maybe you don’t say anything? Does he say anything to you? Don’t try to control it. Spend some time with just the two of you.

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<sup>4</sup> Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Colorado Springs: Tyndale Momentum, 2010), 139.